

Bob Jones on Why We Need Rail



By [Bob Jones](#)

Wednesday - November 02, 2011

Midweek: Just Thoughts Column

There are good reasons why the city and state are moving ahead with Oahu's rail plan besides the obvious ones that we voted for it, have been taxed for it for nearly five years, and the Federal Transit Administration gave it the green light.

- 1) The argument that alternatives were not fully considered is not fact-based. They were, in great detail. Saying otherwise is a canard from the let's-keep-our-horse-and-buggy people.
- 2) Yes, it's heavy rail rather than light rail. Light rail essentially means a streetcar. That was tossed out early on because running a many-coaches train on the street would mean stopping traffic at every intersection and substantial pedestrian risk.
- 3) Yes, elevated heavy rail will be on the ugly side, but we long ago uglified Oahu with suburban sprawl. When you've created a suburban mess and have to move people you inherit more uglification. Bangkok already was ugly when its elevated Skytrain went in. We're already ugly except in those *Hawaii Five-O* beauty shots.



An artist's rendering of a HART train
approaching a station. Honolulu Authority for
Rapid Transportation image

4) Buses are great, but to move large numbers of people into downtown would require an enormous add-on of buses, and that would mean more vehicles on our already-jam-packed roads during rush hours. Why add to the traffic count?

5) Freeway flyovers sound great when proposed by would-be mayor Panos Prevedourous, but he's a hard-core highway aficionado. He ignores that all the added vehicles on the flyover have to get off somewhere. The problem is compounded.

6) Standing down and rethinking the whole project isn't an option at this point. We've invested big bucks in basic planning and community meetings. There are times when you've taken huge steps and you must make the next leap of faith. This is one.

7) The train will not make traffic congestion a thing of the past and no government official has said it will. What's been said is that without the train, traffic will be totally gridlocked in later years. You'll sit for long periods at each traffic light as you try to leave the downtown area or drive Nimitz Highway. Freeways will be car parks.

8) We eventually need to extend the train to UH and Waikiki, so we'll likely be paying that extra excise tax forever.

Get used to it. We probably need an unending 5 percent.

Option: Limit vehicle imports. Chance of that is zero.

9) A major reason for the train is to allow development along its corridor. I would hope vertical housing with retail space. It would present a marvelous opportunity for small business if done right.

10) Nobody's lied or misled on this project. Many have mis-inferred. To say the city or the state misused the law to ram this through is false. The city's done exactly what the Federal Transit Administration said to do.

It is too bad we need an ugly and expensive train. But we do.